

Jackson Lake Information Meeting
Jackson, WY
May 8, 2014

Notes From Breakout Groups:

General Themes:

- Access is an issue in the summer and winter.
 - Summer access problems due to water level fluctuations and crowding
 - Winter access problems due to restrictions on snowplanes and snowmachines
- Some disagreement on whether or not fishing has changed, but more anglers think that fishing has decreased than has increased or stayed the same. Some disagreement on timing of the change as well.
- Lake levels affect fishing in Jackson Lake

All Comments:

Has Fishing Changed:

- Less fish in the last few years but good quality fish
- Don't catch as many little lake trout in the summer any more
- Catch more non-game fish in the summer, almost none in the winter
- Fly fishing – fewer/smaller fishing over the past few years
- Spent past 15 years jigging and trolling – fish numbers down and more sporadic
- Fewer/smaller fish over the past 3 years – may be due to change in technique from trolling to fly fishing
- Used to catch more cutthroat in the summer during the 80's
- Size and number of fish has declined
- There has not been a change in quantity/quality
- Fall fishing isn't as active as it was 5-6 years ago
- Catch more big fish that used to
- Jackson Lake is not fishing like it used to. After stocking decreased, the fishing has been declining
- More big fish caught in the winter
- Fishing declines as soon as water levels go down through big water releases
- Fewer cutthroat. When lake trout fishing was the best, there were more cuts, now there are more browns
- Past 5 years catching more brown trout. Ratios are 2 browns to every 1 laker. Using the same depth and technique when fishing as had in the past
- Don't catch nearly as many fish
- Not as many little fish
- Gradual decline in fishing since 2000
- Old spots aren't fishing as well and the quality (both size and number of fish) is going down

What Anglers Are Seeing Out There:

- Lots of fishing areas have been lost to anglers since the snowplane ban
- Used to spend a lot of time on the lake in the winter – it was more social with snowplanes
- Signal Mountain boat ramp parking has been taken away. Need handicap access.
- Increased fees but less access to the lake
- A lot more people during the week and no stocking has to be having an impact
- More catch and release fishing than there used to be
- Improved technology and science improved fishing/catch rates
- Limits should be scaled back
- Many factors affecting fish – low water, water temperature
- Lets bring Yellowstone lake trout to Jackson Lake rather than kill them
- See lots of big females in the Spring with eggs that didn't spawn in the fall
- Access – loss of snowplanes – can't go on as early or late, can't access same areas with snowmobiles
- Baitfish production decreased with lake level drawdowns
- Lake levels affects spawning lake trout because habitat isn't available
- More people fishing in the summer, gets congested
- Fishing methods haven't changed much
- Winter access is limited for motorized use and it concentrates the use to Coulter
- Noticed increase disease (bubbling on the skin, parasitic worms)
- 95% less anglers on the lake in the winter
- No more snowplanes – this changed people from full time (40 hours a week) fishing to 1-2 times a season
- Still enjoy the lake because of the experience and the possibility of catching a big fish
- Enjoyment of winter angling has gone down with less people present, but some people prefer the solitude
- What anglers want in the fish has changed – want the fish for different reasons (eating size fish now)
- National Park Service regulations destroyed the experience
- Frustrated with Game and Fish – no help on the access issue. Less anglers = less licenses
- There are still areas where anglers can use snowplanes, but prefer to fish on Jackson Lake
- People who took snowplanes now fish less, people who walked or took sleds fish the same amount
- Even though people go fishing less, the quality is still good
- More people walk out on the ice than take sleds (out of necessity) but there are less people out in general
- Lower lake levels in the summer – less access to parts of the lake, fish preferences change
- No snowmobile parking – trailer parking is full of skiers. Other areas should be open to access for motorized use.
- More people jigging than in the past. They can use GPS and fish finders to anchor on the right spots in the summer
- Anglers should only harvest what they need
- Spaulding Bay closure to boats last summer has limited access

- There is lots of congestion at the ramps, the courtesy dock should be left open
- Rarely see wardens or rangers
- Number of chubs in the lake is competing with lake trout
- Fish seems to have food in their stomachs in the winter but not in the summer
- Snowplanes added to the experience on the lake
- Difficult for handicap access without snowplanes. They allowed anyone who had trouble with access (children, whole families, etc.)
- Lake levels affect summer access
- Not as many loons as there were in the past
- Increase in the number of turkey vultures around Coulter Bay
- Increase in sophisticated gear (electronics and downriggers) have increased number of people jigging
- Fish finders allow precise access to bars and fishing spots
- Used to have access/boat launch opportunity North of Leeks at Lizard Creek and even at Flagg Ranch, that is gone now

Questions:

- Closure of Park roads are limiting access – is this due to budget cuts? **In 2013, several roads were closed due to the sequestration. These roads will be open in 2014.**
- How much worse would fishing be with pressure from continued snowplane access? **Good question. It could certainly affect fishing if people are harvesting fish and the amount of harvest is limiting the population. We don't know what is the biggest thing limiting the population is at this time, but harvest certainly plays a role.**
- Can we change the limit to 6 fish total? Not the split limit between lake trout and other trout. **Currently, lake trout and all other trout are already split and it would be difficult to merge them, however, it is possible change regulations/limits for each group separately.**
- If you find that lake trout numbers are down, would Game and Fish consider stocking again? **We do have the ability to start stocking again, however, the decision would have to be biologically justified as well as coordinated with Grand Teton National Park and our hatchery system.**
- Can limits of different trout species be split? **Lake trout are currently split from other trout species. We could split out brown trout and cutthroat trout if it was necessary.**
- Hard to believe increased anglers is putting a dent in the populations. Are climatic changes having a greater impact? **It's hard to tease out what is having the most impact on fish in Jackson Lake, however, both angling pressure and climate are certainly capable of impacting fish populations.**
- Is temperature of Jackson Lake having an effect? There is a correlation in temp and fish. Water level draw down can increase temperatures even fractions of degrees. **Surface temperature fluctuates greatly throughout the day, which makes it difficult to draw specific conclusions about how temperature due to draw down affects fish populations.**
- Do low water years hurt fish? **Depends on how low the water gets. We are lucky in Jackson Lake, that even during very low water years, we still have a lot of water that fish can utilize, however water levels affect fish habitat in the years of low water**

as well as the years after. Generally, in reservoir or lake systems, periodic dewatering and rewatering will actually release nutrients and stimulate aquatic plant growth which provides habitat and food for forage fish, which, in turn, provides food for other species, like lake trout.

- With the fishing pressure (particularly in the summer), how will natural reproduction sustain the fishery? Would decreasing the limit help? **If all other factors affecting fish survival are good, natural reproduction should be enough to sustain the fishing pressure on Jackson Lake. One adult female lake trout can/will produce up to 6,000 eggs. However, if there are other factors affecting survival of eggs, young, or adults, fishing pressure could be adding to the impact to the population. Decreasing the limit on lake trout could help if fishing pressure is contributing to a decline in fish.**
- Could there be regulations to protect large fish? **Currently, the creel limit on lake trout is 6 fish, only one can be greater than 24 inches, so this does help protect large fish.**
- Concern over what to do if a fish is bleeding and likely to die? **If an angler catches a fish that is likely to die, it is best to add it to the creel. If the angler is already at their creel limit, the fish has to be released back to the water. Despite wounds that sometimes look life threatening, fish can survive a lot if they are released into the water quickly after capture.**
- Why does Game and Fish put in two reward tags when only pay for one? **Game and Fish started putting a second reward tag in lake trout a couple years ago in order to make the tag number easier to read. Unfortunately, this has caused some confusion regarding how much money an angler will get back. It is \$25 per tagged fish, not per tag.**
- At what age to lake trout stop reproducing? **They never stop reproducing, but the quality of eggs goes down as the fish get older.**
- Are there any studies planned for fish movement in the lake? **No movement studies are planned for the near future. These studies are very expensive and time consuming in lake systems which is why very little has been done in the past.**
- What is the biggest fish netted by Game and Fish? **The biggest lake trout caught in Game and Fish nets during annual trophy netting was a 38 pound female. She was tagged and released. The next largest fish was 28 pounds. This size fish is relatively common during trophy netting. Fish larger than this will often rip through the net or simply bounce off the net.**
- Why were snowplanes and snowmachines eliminated? Was it noise related? **Noise was certainly a factor, but the decision was made by Grand Teton National Park, not the Game and Fish.**
- Why did Game and Fish stop stocking? **Game and Fish stopped stocking lake trout in Jackson Lake because surveys showed only a small proportion of these fish returning to the creel. Additionally, the condition of small lake trout in Jackson Lake is pretty low, indicating that food may be limiting these fish. By putting additional small lake trout into the lake, it could be making the problem worse.**